

## The Classical Review

<http://journals.cambridge.org/CAR>

Additional services for *The Classical Review*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



---

## The Meaning of the Word Teaeth

J. E. Harrison

The Classical Review / Volume 28 / Issue 02 / March 1914, pp 36 - 38  
DOI: 10.1017/S0009840X00006661, Published online: 27 October 2009

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0009840X00006661](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0009840X00006661)

### How to cite this article:

J. E. Harrison (1914). The Meaning of the Word Teaeth. The Classical Review, 28, pp 36-38  
doi:10.1017/S0009840X00006661

**Request Permissions :** [Click here](#)

## THE MEANING OF THE WORD TEΛETH.

IF we consult the lexicon as to the meaning and usage of the word τελετή we find statements of this kind—'τελετή accomplishment, making perfect or complete, hence a rite of initiation—hence any solemn festival or rite, a mystery.' Probably as the word 'hence' passes our lips, some misgiving, however inarticulate, rises in our minds. Τελετή, coming as it undoubtedly does from the root which gives us τελέω, τέλος, τελευτή, must in some way be related to the idea of attaining an end, coming to a τέλος, accomplishing something. But what is the end attained, the thing accomplished, and how is it 'attained' 'accomplished' by a rite of initiation?

The current view is that a τελετή is so called because by it you attain or accomplish a certain moral state, you attain to purity and holiness—or some kind of new spiritual perfection. But a moment's reflection shows that this idea is too abstract to have gone to the making of a primitive word. There must at the outset be some sort of definite, concrete act accomplished; what is it?

The answer is very simple. Indeed, once stated, it is I think obvious; τελετή is the rite not of any and every vague 'accomplishment,' it is the rite of the first human accomplishment, the rite of growing up or making to grow up, the rite of maturity. In a word, the rite, the τελετή, is the world-wide rite of adolescence initiation. Religious rites—I don't say the whole of religion—take their rise in social institutions. This use of τέλειος for 'grown up' is, of course, too familiar to need emphasis. It is freely used to express maturity for man, plants, and animals. In the *Geoponica*<sup>1</sup> we hear of young vines and grown-up vines (τὰς νέας ἀμπέλους καὶ τὰς τελεῖους). Aeschylus<sup>2</sup> expressly and beautifully tells us that trees have, like men, their hour of being grown up.

δένδρων τις ὥρα δ' ἐκ νοτίζοντος γάνους  
τέλειός ἐστι.

Yet in translation this primitive meaning even of τέλειος is often forgotten. When in the opening of the *Iliad*,<sup>3</sup> Phoebus Apollo slays the host of the Achaeans with his arrows, Achilles wonders if the god may be appeased.

αἶ κέν πως ἀγνῶν κνίσσης αἰγῶν τε τελείων  
βούλεται ἀντιάσας ἡμῖν ἀπὸ λουγὸν  
ἀμύναι.

The passage is usually translated 'the savour of lambs or unblemished goats,' taking τέλειος as meaning 'perfect, 'spotless.' But surely the point is the age of the victims. Apollo, god of young things, will accept either a young lamb or a young goat, but he prefers them mature, grown up, complete in age and functions. In like fashion Peleus<sup>4</sup> vowed for Achilles that if he should return safe to his native Thessaly he should 'shear his hair for the river Spercheios and offer fifty full grown rams (ἑννορχα) to the river's springs. Achilles as full grown κοῦρος himself offers grown up rams to the source of all growth, his native river. Further, if I am right, the 'perfect' hecatombs of Homer become of course hecatombs of full grown animals as such of much greater value.

ἔρδου δ' Ἀπόλλωνι τεληέσσας ἐκατόμβας.

Apollo again, a full grown κοῦρος, demands grown up victims. It is the old sympathetic magic.

In the light of this meaning of τελεία Hera Teleia wears a new aspect. We have always thought of her vaguely as the goddess who 'presided over' who 'accomplished' marriage. But she is more and simpler. She is Maturity incarnate, involving of course to ancient thinking marriage. She is the exact counterpart of Hebe—Youthful-Bloom—she is the projected Rite of Adolescence in woman-form. Hera as Παῖς Τελεία Χήρα is simply the three ages of man, childhood, maturity, old age. Of these three ages the midmost was to the

<sup>1</sup> 3. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Nauck, *Frg.* 44. See my *Themis*, 1912, p. 175 ff.

<sup>3</sup> I. 66.

<sup>4</sup> XXIII. 117.

Greeks immeasurably the most important, and is so still to the savage. It alone gave its name to a rite, to the rite of Maturity, Τελετή.

This primal basis of maturity was in the Eleusinian Mysteries almost wholly overlaid by moral developments, purification, sanctification, and the like. But it emerges in obscure places of mythology, and never more instructively than in the story of the daughters of Proitos. Apollodorus,<sup>1</sup> quoting Hesiod, tells the tale. In brief the daughters of Proitos, King of Tiryns, went mad, and ranged, lowing like cows, over the mountains. Finally they were healed by the soothsayer Melampous, who married one of them and succeeded to the kingdom of Tiryns. The figure of Melampous takes us back, it may be noted, to early Minyan days.

Now *when* did the daughters of Proitos go mad? Apollodorus is explicit. When they were grown up—ὡς ἐτελείωθησαν, ἐμάνησαν. *Why* did they go mad?

Two reasons are given, both equally instructive. Hesiod says it was because they refused the initiation rites of Dionysos (ὅτι τὰς Διονύσου τελετὰς οὐ κατεδέχοντο). But Akusilaos told a different tale, yet with the like moral. He said it was because 'they held the image of Hera cheap' (διότι τὸ τῆς Ἡρας ξόανον ἐξηντέλισαν). Pherekydes<sup>2</sup> adds that they made light of the sanctuary of Hera and said their father's palace was finer. We have here probably an echo of the old days when the King, like Oidipos, was head medicine-man (θεός) and the divinity had but a subordinate shrine in his palace. Now Akusilaos was an Argive. He wrote about 525 B.C., and seems to have made a sort of prose Hesiod called *Genealogies*, in which he appears to have corrected Hesiod in matters of local interest.

Who was this Hera at whom, according to Akusilaos, the maidens mocked? Why Hera Teleia herself, she of the Initiation Rite for Women. She was the goddess of the old Heraion, at Stymphalos. She had her triple form as Παῖς, Τελεία, and Χήρα. It was she

who on Mt. Kokkygion wedded Zeus in the form of a cuckoo.<sup>3</sup>

The two reasons given for the madness correspond probably to two different strata of the primitive religion of Hera and the superimposed cult of Dionysos, but the moral in each case is the same. You must not, dare not, cannot grow up without a Rite of Growing up, a Telete.

The cure of the madness clinches the matter. Melampous pursues<sup>4</sup> the women 'with a crashing noise and with a certain divine dance' (μετ' ἀλαλαγμοῦ καὶ τινος ἐνθέου χορείας). What the exact nature of the ἀλαλαγμός was we are not told. I should conjecture it was a ritual shout together with the clashing of ritual gear. The ἐνθεος χορεία must have been a ritual dance—in a word the Proitides submit to the ritual which when they were first grown up they resisted, and, once initiated, they are speedily married.

Marriage is to the Roman Church a sacrament, to the Anglican 'an excellent mystery.' To the Greek marriage was the Rite of Accomplishment, the τελετή. Life was not lived to the full till it was transmitted. Pollux<sup>5</sup> says distinctly: καὶ τέλος ὁ γάμος ἐκαλεῖτο καὶ τέλειοι οἱ γεγαμηκότες διὰ τοῦτο καὶ Ἡρα τελεία ἡ ζυγία. Hence the similarity of marriage and initiation ceremonies.<sup>6</sup> Common to both are the ritual bath of purification and the carrying of the λίκη for fertility. The Danaides<sup>7</sup> are ἀτελεῖς γάμου, and in Hades they are 'of those who have not been initiated.'<sup>8</sup> The preliminary sacrifice before a wedding was called προτέλεια;<sup>9</sup> the first married night was known as the νύξ μυστική.<sup>10</sup>

Initiation among primitive peoples

<sup>3</sup> Schol. ed. *Theocrit.* XV. 64. See my *Themis*, p. 180.

<sup>4</sup> The διωγμός was a regular ceremonial feature, and formed part of the ritual of the daughters of Minyas, the Agrionia, a ritual of which the Proitides myth is a reflection.

<sup>5</sup> *Th.* III. 38.

<sup>6</sup> For this whole subject see Mr. Lawson's *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion*, p. 590 ff.

<sup>7</sup> See my *Prolegomena*, p. 614.

<sup>8</sup> Paus. X. 31. 9-11.

<sup>9</sup> Pollux. *Th.* III. 38, τὰν (τῇ Ἡρᾷ) τοῖς προτελείοις προτέλουν τὰς κόρας.

<sup>10</sup> Chariton IV. 4.

<sup>1</sup> II. 2. 2.

<sup>2</sup> ap. Schol. *Od.* XV. 225.

prepares a full grown boy for two duties: he becomes a warrior, he is fitted to be a father. Initiation to a girl who cannot fight is practically merged in marriage.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting, however, to find that among certain tribes of North Australia<sup>2</sup> a man's initiation is not complete till he is the father of a child. Thus in the Larrakia Tribe a

boy is made a *Beliei*, the first rank of initiation, and can then take a wife, but it is not till he has had his first child that he attains to the rank of *Mullinu*. The initiation as Mullinu involves similar ceremonies and a residence in the Bush away from the wife of two or three months. Only after the birth of a child is the cycle of a man's life, his *τελετή*, accomplished.

<sup>1</sup> I owe this suggestion to Mr. Lawson.

<sup>2</sup> Baldwin Spencer, *Report of Preliminary Scientific Expedition to the Northern Territory*, p. 19. Melbourne, 1912.

J. E. HARRISON.

*Newnham College, Cambridge.*

### THE SOURCE OF PLUTARCH: SOLON XX.—XXIV.

IT is important to establish as far as possible what is the historical authority of these chapters, which contain most of the evidence for the private law of Solon. The question was discussed with care and acuteness by Prinz<sup>1</sup> and Begemann,<sup>2</sup> and their results have been generally accepted. But both these scholars wrote before the *Ath. Pol.* was discovered, and the time seems ripe to reconsider the question.<sup>3</sup>

The generally accepted belief is that Plutarch in these chapters has used Didymus *περὶ τῶν ἀξόνων τῶν Σόλωνος*.<sup>4</sup> The main argument which supports this contention is as follows. It appears highly probable that Plutarch used either Didymus or Hermippus. Diogenes Laertius in his life of Solon used Hermippus largely,<sup>5</sup> and the laws given by Plutarch, Cc. XX.—XXIV., are not found in Diogenes. Plutarch, therefore, has not used Hermippus here, but Didymus.<sup>6</sup> Further, Plutarch cites Didymus in the first words of the life, and in C. XXV. may be relying on

the same author for his reference to Cratinus.<sup>7</sup>

These arguments deserve rather closer examination. It is dangerous to suppose that Diogenes has given us in brief all that stood in Hermippus, or has confined himself to the use of that author. The first chapter of his work is a very brief account of Solon's intervention to help the poor. This may well be Hermippus; at least it is very much like a summary of what is found in the certainly Hermippean parts of Plutarch. Then come the laws, and at this point Diogenes dismisses the subject with the exasperating sentence *ἔπειτα τοὺς λοιποὺς νόμους ἔθηκεν, οὓς μακρὸν ἂν εἴη διεξιέναι, καὶ ἐς τοὺς ἀξόνας κατέθετο*. This seems to imply that Diogenes has in his authority a collection of laws attributed to Solon, but most inconsiderately omits them. This is then evidence that a collection of laws was found in Hermippus at this point, rather than evidence to the contrary. And it is not improbable that Plutarch, when he reached this point in Hermippus, was less afraid of his readers' impatience, and so used the collection in the chapters under discussion.

To return to Diogenes. After the sentence cited above, that unstable writer turned to discuss the affair with Salamis, and thence to the times of

<sup>1</sup> R. Prinz, *De Solonis Plutarchoi Fontibus*. Diss. Bonn., 1867.

<sup>2</sup> H. Begemann, *Quaestiones Soloneae*, Spec. I. Diss. Holtzminden, 1875.

<sup>3</sup> The ultimate source was believed to be the *Ath. Pol.* Oncken, *Staatsl. des Ar.* II., p. 419 ff., p. 435.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Busolt, *Gr. Gesch.* II.<sup>2</sup>, p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche, *De Laertii Diogenis Fontibus*, Rh. Mus. XXIII. (1868) p. 632 ff., XXIV. (1869) 181 ff., XXV. (1870) p. 181 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Begemann, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> M. Schmidt, *Didymi Chalcenteri Fragmenta*, p. 29 ff.